Cross-Cultural Consumer/Consumption Research: Dealing with Issues Emerging from Globalization and Fragmentation

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To understand the effects of globalization and fragmentation, macromarketing scholars need insights about links between individual consumer behavior and societal outcomes. The challenge in this regard is to create a program of macro-oriented cross-cultural research. This article offers a cross-cultural consumer behavior research framework for this purpose. The framework encompasses four key areas of consumer behavior that are related to the forces of globalization and fragmentation, including the environment, identity, well-being, and market structure and policy. A discussion of these substantive areas is followed by a suggested macro-micro-oriented research agenda and a call for paradigm plurality in pursuing this agenda.

Keywords: *consumer behavior; cross-cultural; research agenda; marketing; international*

Consumer behavior is a powerful macroforce, as evidenced by its links to pollution (Kilbourne and Beckmann 1998; Princen 1999; Myers 1997), societal well-being (Ger 1997), and resource use (Horton 1987). Yet the macromarketing field lacks a research agenda that adequately reflects consumer behavior writ large (and international). Reliance on the cross-cultural consumer behavior literature is unlikely to solve this problem. Its multicountry or cross-national comparisons typically entail extensions of issues from single-country studies and examine consumer behavior from a micro or marketing management perspective (see Boddewyn 1981; Cornwell forthcoming). In contrast, this article discusses a macromarketing-oriented, cross-cultural consumer behavior research agenda.

The framework for this agenda is reflected in Figure 1. In this context, *cross-cultural consumer research* refers to simple comparisons and more extensive multicultural examinations of behavior in national or regional cultures, subcultures, ethnic groups, minority groups, and immigrant groups. For example, Hui et al. (1993) is a study of four subcultures in Canada.[1]

Figure 1 highlights four areas of consumer behavior that are influenced by globalization and fragmentation. These areas include the environment, elective identity, well-being, and market structure and policy. Research goals are represented along the sides of the framework to underscore the need to link micro- and macrobehavior and to encourage paradigm plurality.

The following discussion begins with an overview of the relevance of globalization and fragmentation to cross-cultural consumer behavior. Next, issues related to the four substantive foci in Figure 1 are examined. In addition, a macromarketing research agenda for each area is suggested.

GLOBALIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION

Globalization and fragmentation are extensions of formative events that occurred throughout the twentieth century (Clark 1997). The greatest expansion of transworld relations and thus globalization, however, occurred after 1960 (Scholte 2000), and it continues today. In economic as well as broader political, cultural, and social terms, the critical forces of globalization include transnational organizations, mass media, the Internet, and the World Trade Organization. Forces of fragmentation include regionalization, grassroots initiatives, regional trade blocks, and activist groups. The elements in Figure 1 are intended to indicate that consumer behavior in the areas of interest may be influenced by the interplay of and overlap of globalization and fragmentation forces. The

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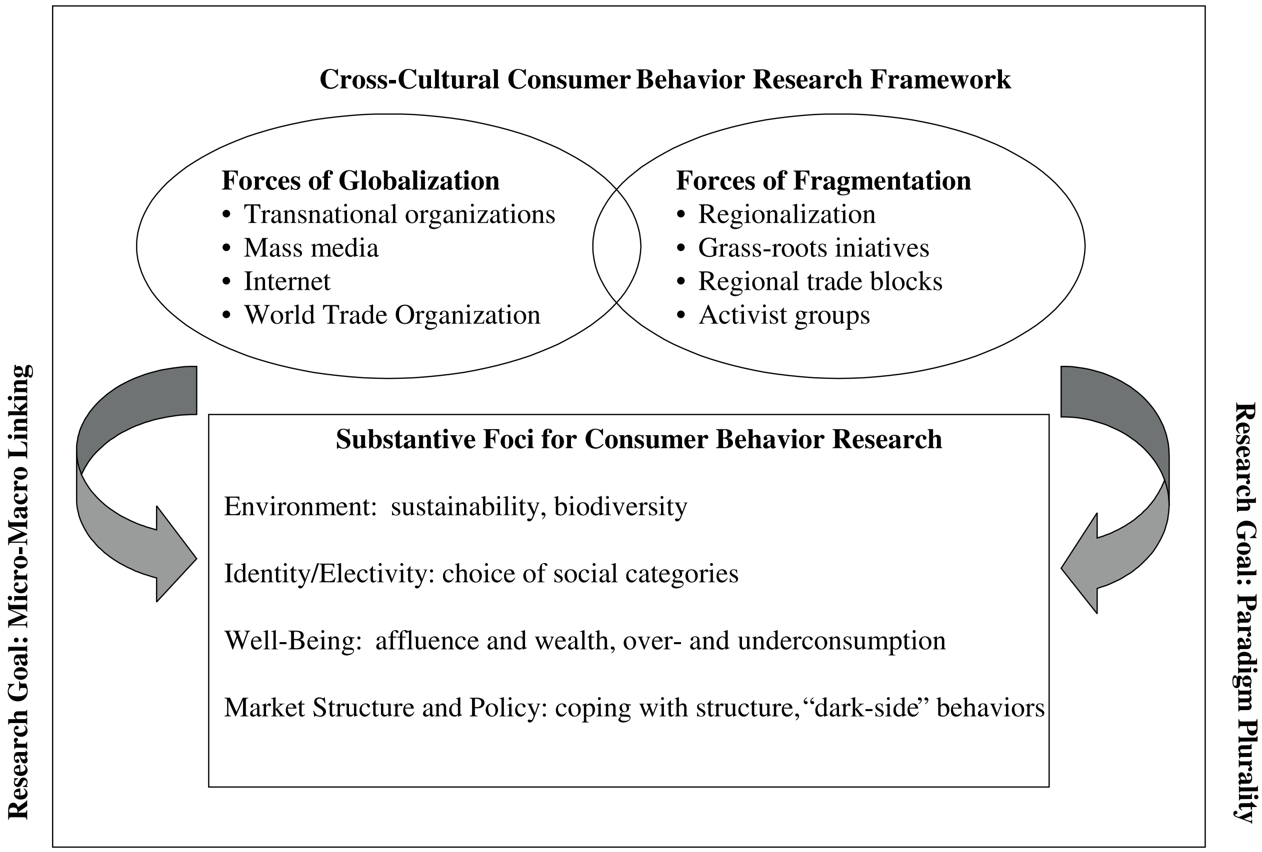

FIGURE 1 CROSS-CULTURAL CONSUMER BEHAVIOR RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

separate listings of these respective forces are not, however, intended to suggest that these forces are necessarily in strict opposition or that there may not be complex interactions among forces.

For example, the Internet, although creating an explosion in global connectivity with its open exchange of worldwide rich information (Gereffi 2001), also facilitates fragmentation. Roper (2002, 17) noted that "the Internet has been used by activists against a liberalized global economy." The resulting fragmentation takes varied forms but is based in grass-roots, regional-level initiatives that fuel difference.

As indicated in Figure 1, other forces also affect the impact of globalization and fragmentation processes on consumer/consumption behavior. The proliferation of transnational organizations, for example, has "potentially overwhelming power to influence our lives as consumers" (Ger and Belk 1996a, 274). Trade treaties favoring the business and financial interests of the core regions that are home to the transnational corporations bring about a widening of inequalities between regions (Cumbers 2000) that have social, environmental, and cultural costs (Henderson 2000).

> [Globalization]denotes movements in both the *intensity* and the *extent* of international interactions: in the former sense, globalization overlaps to some degree with related ideas of integration, interdependence, multilaterism, openness, and interpenetration; in the latter, it points to the geographical spread of these tendencies. (Clark 1997, 1)

It may increase "complex connectivity" (Tomlinson 1999) and lead to the proliferation of contact points and movements that are both sociopsychological and physical in nature. As Featherstone (1995, 6) argued, globalization compresses historical cultural categories, and thus things once held apart become juxtaposed, cultures pile on top of each other, and there becomes "too much culture to handle and organize into coherent belief systems, means of orientation and practical knowledge."

Unmistakably, globalization fuels fragmentation. Individuals need points of orientation, a sense of control, and a sense of identity, all of which have been eroded by the homogeneity of globalization. *Fragmentation* is shorthand for the tendencies opposite to globalization: on the one hand, it suggests disintegration, autarchy, unilateralism, closure, and isolation

(Clark 1997, 1), whereas "on the other, the trend is toward nationalism or regionalism, spatial distension, separatism and heterogeneity." These countervailing forces of fragmentation are diverse.

Ohmae (2000) declared the nation-state as a dysfunctional unit and supports the rise of the "region state." Region-state boundaries ignore national configurations because they grow and contract relative to market demands. Ohmae gave as an example the so-called growth triangle of Singapore and its neighboring Indonesian islands (2000, 94). Region-states are an economic, orienting force for a group of people. Allegiance and outlook, as well as consumer behavior, follow economic opportunity and prosperity.

Beck (2000) argued that political fragmentation is the result of transnational companies that have the power to shift employment opportunities and thus play one country against another and in this process produce "subpolitics" that transcend established political boundaries. Despite these pressures, Petras (2002, 2) made a case that there has been a strengthening of the state, "whether imperial, capital, or neo colonial," in terms of expanded activities and ubiquitous intervention in society and the economy. He contended that it is particularly so in imperialist nations in which the state concentrates power and projects it around the world. Even international policy experts who feel strongly that the nation-state will continue to be a meaningful source of governance into the future (Scholte 2000) have admitted that fissures in the old ideas of state have resulted in disperse forms of governance that are multilayered and complex.

Aptly, globalization in the consumer realm, dubbed *McDonaldization*, is defined as the principles of the fast-food restaurant that are becoming dominant in more and more sectors of world society (Ritzer 1996). Barber (2000) termed the possible outcome of increasing integration and uniformity as a "McWorld" where nations are pressed into one commercially homogeneous global network. Barber also saw the antipodal force of retribalization that is opposed to every kind of interdependence, with the result being that the "planet is falling precipitately apart and coming reluctantly together at the very same moment" (2000, 23).

Converging tastes and preferences of consumers, growing similarity in mass media experiences, escalating world-level communications, and increasing mobility of the world's population may seem to all point to increasing homogeneity among world peoples. This perspective on globalization, however, denotes a world in which ideas and practices, generated primarily by the West, dominate overall while alternatives are pushed into oblivion. It fails to reflect possible "creolization" (Hannerz 1996). Fragmentation in the face of homogenization is perhaps best described by Wilk (1995, 118): "We are not all becoming the same, but we are portraying, dramatizing and communicating our differences to each other in ways that are more widely intelligible."

Globalization and fragmentation may appear to represent contradictory themes if the former is perceived as worldwide homogenization with increasing sameness of products, lifestyles, patterns of consumption, and cultural experiences, whereas the latter is viewed as new combinations of diverse marketable products representing an array of microcultures (Firat 1996). These two trends, however, can be described as the globalization of fragmentation (Firat 1996). The products, lifestyles, brand names, and images historically linked to separate and initially incompatible cultures become attractive and exciting for consumers looking to escape the dominant "sameness" that can pervade the world. Contrary to the view that globalization is simply a process in which the dominance of one culture of style dictates all others, it can be more realistically viewed as a diffusion of available and "seemingly competing forms of styles" (Firat 1996, 79).

Globalization is thus composed of coexisting homogenizing and heterogenizing forces, and the tension between these two forces is one of the key challenges in the cultural economy (Appadurai 1990). Appadurai (1990) explored the complex and overlapping order of the new cultural economy by developing a framework that incorporates dimensions of global cultural flow. He envisioned flows of people, technology, money, images, and ideas moving around the globe and consolidating at particular points into national, regional, and local structural formations. The scale, volume, and speed of these flows have become so intense that the disjunctures between them affect the politics of global culture (Appadurai 1990; King 1997). The flow may not be unidimensional, but within these dynamics, the affluent part of the world overrides the less affluent part of the world in terms of what is produced and consumed (Ger 1997).

Although advocating alternatives to homogenization, Ger and Belk (1996b) argued that the development of a global culture has been forwarded through four distinct developments that apply pressure toward homogenization. These include (1) the proliferation of transnational corporations that have built up enormous power to influence the lives of consumers; (2) the rise of global capitalism that transpired with the demise of Communism in 1989; (3) the widespread aspiration for material possessions, or "globalized consumption ethic," as the availability and production of goods increase; and (4) the homogenization of global consumption. These pressures seem ubiquitous and relentless.

In summary, the backdrop of an individual's daily consumer behavior is being influenced by powerful international forces. It is argued here that more must be done to understand consumer behavior with regard to this larger context. Although research sensitive to globalization and fragmentation issues has been undertaken, as reflected in the prior and following discussion, the majority of cross-cultural consumer behavior studies are at the microlevel (for a review of studies, see Sojaka and Tansuhaj 1995) and do not draw implications for society at large.

GLOBALIZATION, FRAGMENTATION, AND RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

A recent comprehensive review of the cross-cultural consumer behavior literature that includes 451 empirical studies spanning thirty-five years (Cornwell forthcoming) finds more than adequate coverage of many micromanagerially oriented topics but less than adequate coverage of macro-oriented and societally oriented issues. For example, "country-of-origin" studies examining the influence of the country of manufacture or design on consumer decision making was the most researched topic (162 studies), whereas the topics of public policy/consumerism/environment (36 studies) and marketizing economies (16 studies) were relatively understudied.

Most cross-cultural consumer behavior research responds more to marketers' needs to navigate the international marketplace than to the need to understand consumer roles in that market place. Managerially oriented studies are important, but there is need for a broader, more encompassing research agenda. Although the processes of globalization and fragmentation are reflected in these managerially oriented areas of consumer behavior research, a more fundamental understanding of core consumption drivers is needed. Given the powerful processes of globalization and fragmentation as a backdrop to consumer behavior, we have identified the four topics of environment, identity, well-being, and market structure as research imperatives that deserve renewed and redirected attention. These important yet underresearched areas represent the natural environment, in which globalization effects are overtly realized; the market structure, a person-made environment relevant to marketing that is often the purveyor of globalization effects; and two aspects of the individual that are strongly influenced by both processes of globalization and fragmentation. Additional support for the importance of each of these foci is offered in subsequent sections.

The complexity of globalization and fragmentation processes demands that consumer behavior researchers in the marketing field shift their perspective from the individual and individual firm toward more macro-oriented research that links individual behavior with social outcomes. This will both improve our basic understanding and at the same time support our applied understanding. In the following sections, globalization and fragmentation issues relevant to each of the proposed research topics are discussed in combination with existing literature on each of these topics. New directions for research in each area are then outlined.

Environment

Globalization has raised serious concerns for the environment in terms of production and consumption as a result of the domination of the affluent world. Princen (1999) suggested that consumption is a significant driver of environmental change and equally important as technology and population. This view is supported by Ger (1997), who noted that production and consumption patterns are responsible for transboundary problems such as ocean pollution, habitat chemicalization, and depletion of the ozone layer. In particular, carbon emissions, which affect global warming, impinge on all nations regardless of their level of carbon dioxide production (Myers 1997). According to Myers, the marketplace must apply prices that reflect all environmental costs. The price of gasoline, for example, should be calculated on the social cost of air and noise pollution so that those with a strong car culture can gain an education via their wallets. Further measures to curb consumption include the phasing out of subsidies that stimulate the overuse of resources such as forests, water, and fossil fuels. Incentives should be provided that promote efficient resource usage and practices such as recycling and waste management.

Deeply ingrained but unsustainable behavior includes wasteful consumption patterns by wealthy communities accustomed to an excessive lifestyle. The education of consumers may not necessarily encourage them to oppose global consumerism, but, as Ger and Belk (1996b) pointed out, it is more likely to assist the consumer to be a better consumer. For example, consumer resistance in the form of boycotts and protests do take place in the more affluent world, although it is rare in the less affluent world. It has also been suggested that media might play a role in promoting sustainable consumption by persuading people to consume with discrimination and in moderation (Myers 1997). Anticonsumption communications, however, seem to contrast with much of what global media seek to achieve.

In a bid to cajole the environmentally concerned consumer, many marketers purport their products to be "green." Shultz and Holbrook (1999) questioned the value of these marketing strategies, products, and advertising campaigns, suggesting that they may be "greenwashing' with little true environmental protection or improvement forthcoming. In their analysis, "Marketing and the Tragedy of the Commons," they argued, "Environmentalism will be one of the greatest challenges in the twenty-first century. The effect of marketing activities on environmental preservation therefore matters increasingly to many marketers, consumers and marketing policy scholars" (Shultz and Holbrook 1999, 218).

Although a handful of cross-cultural studies in environmentally oriented consumer behavior were conducted in the 1990s, they do not constitute the level of research that this topic deserves. More important, most of these studies are in the comparative tradition (e.g., Chan 1996; Forman and Sriram 1991), and, although useful in their own right, they do not consider consumer-related environmental issues in a systematic manner.

Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) noted in their review and critical assessment of research relating to marketing and the environment that the focus has shifted from the early characterization of the environmentally conscious consumer to more macro-issues related to sustainable marketing and its association with dominant social paradigm. They suggested that the general body of research has been limited to a narrow managerialist approach but is now becoming alert to environmental values, paradigms, and ecological beliefs. Still problematic is the "lack of interdisciplinary research and the failure to adequately define the environmental problem within the marketing discourse" (Kilbourne and Beckmann 1998, 521). Kilbourne and Beckmann concluded that future research issues related to environmental problems should be addressed at the macrolevel to consider consumption modes, marketplace freedom, and economic expansionism. They asserted that the combination of macro-related research with micromarketing represents a major challenge but will present improved opportunities for developing effective environmental policy.

As Shultz and Holbrook (1999, 225) argued, protracted environmental degradation indicates the need for fresh thinking. One avenue to new thinking is the use of system dynamics modeling (Sterman 2000). System dynamics helps address problems that share core elements such as (1) policy resistance, (2) drift to low performance, and (3) "addiction" or dependency (Meadows 1982). Many environmentally oriented consumer behaviors such as recycling include these core elements. For example, consumer inducements and encouragement to recycle have been studied in many countries, but arguably this behavior is policy resistant and drifts to low levels of recycling after campaigns conclude.

In view of the importance of recycling to the health of the environment, there is a need to understand what motivates consumers to recycle and what types of marketing strategies can influence this activity (Lord and Putrevu 1998). Kilbourne and Beckmann (1998) pointed out that whereas early researchers were focusing on environmental decline symptoms, only Fisk (1973) targeted the root causes of the environmental problems and used a systems approach to marketing. Systems thinking and the use of system dynamics modeling allow analysis of a large range of interconnected elements, thus satisfying the suggestion in this framework for micro-macro linking and also the potential inclusion of aspects of well-being and analysis of market structure and policy.

The prior discussion highlights the following research questions:

- How can marketing's role in environmentally responsible production and consumption be defined? Moreover, how can this responsibility be communicated and ingrained in practice? Schultz and Holbrook (1999) drew attention to the challenging nature of environmentalism and indicated their concerns regarding the extent and nature of marketing practices relating to the environment. Perhaps consideration of the so-called triple bottom line (see Waddock, Bodwell, and Graves 2002) might prove useful. Rising public expectations regarding economic, social, and environmental performance of the firm provide an opportunity for quantification of marketing's contribution in all three areas.
- What factors affect consumer overconsumption and misconsumption that lead to environmental degradation? Myers (1997) accounted for consumption excesses by underscoring humankind's need to "keep up with the neighbors" and the historical view that more is always better. Is the expanding global awareness of what "international neighbors" consume driving excessive consumption? Are there other explanations that provide opportunities for behavior perception modification?
- How can the conflicting consumer goals of identity-constructing consumption (e.g., the use of one's own private vehicle) and environmentally sound conservation (e.g., using public transportation) be reconciled? How can policy makers influence the symbolic meaning related to the consumption of goods so as to improve the social value placed on environmentally friendly behaviors without alienating the marketing community?
- How can individual motivations for environmentally responsible behavior be linked to policy levers? To what extent do existing policies in various countries put consumer motivators and inhibitors in place to protect the environment? How can these policy initiatives be summarized and integrated for a global community if corporate-inspired subpolitics (Beck 2000) play against such initiatives? Resistance to policy related to recycling is high, and, as Lord and Putrevu (1998) argued, it is important to understand consumer motivations. Reviews to ascertain the extent and effectiveness of worldwide policy initiatives outside the marketing literature are required to respond to these important research questions. In addition, as previously mentioned, the systems dynamics approach would be appropriate for studying the complex feedback mechanisms found in the intersection of environmental and social systems.
- What inducements and encouragement for environmentally responsible behavior are likely be most effective? Despite past attempts by governments and concerned environmental groups to attack this issue, limited success has been achieved. Accordingly, global action research would be appropriate in attempting to modify worldwide consumer behavior to protect the environment.

The globalization of lifestyles and patterns of consumption popularized in the West is not sustainable. Moreover, as will be seen in the next section, increased levels of consumption do not necessarily lead to increases in well-being. Contrary to the global consumption ethic, consuming less may actually be better for the world psyche as well as the natural environment.

WELL-BEING

The push by dominant Western countries to look for new markets and cheap labor in less advanced countries, combined with the proliferation of Western values on global culture (Steingard and Fitzgibbons 1995), has implications for societal well-being. Global marketers, for example, encourage extravagant consumption that not only "ties up wealth that should be used to help the poor" (Borgmann 2000, 419), but also can lead to consumer degradation (Borgmann 2000) in the affluent world. For less affluent societies, awareness of high levels of consumption in developed countries may engender envious discontent (Ger 1997).

Wilkie and Moore (1999, 216) offered an insight that is particularly relevant to this article when they asked, "To what extent do marketing managers view themselves as having responsibility for improving the public interest or acting as stewards of a society's resources?" This questions whether our current aggregate marketing system actually represents the best of all possible worlds. Decidedly, there are many authors who believe we could do better (e.g., Heilbroner 1985; Wallerstein 1983), but doing better for all peoples demands significant revision of our current capitalist framework and the related dominant social paradigm that leads to overconsumption in the West and underconsumption in the Third World (Kilbourne 1998).

A recent assessment of the economic well-being afforded the United States as a result of marketing demonstrates the undeniable contribution that marketing has made in a macroeconomic sense (Wilkie and Moore 1999). As examples, Wilkie and Moore (1999) cited contributions to employment and personal income, freedom of choice in consumption, delivery of a standard of living, mass-market efficiencies, and international development. They also balanced their discussion by drawing attention to concerns wrought in part by the aggregate marketing system that includes the promotion of materialism, negative influence on cultural values, cultural imperialism (including natural resource depletion), and inequities in benefit distribution. Although this is only a sample of their more detailed analysis, it is evident that some "externalities" of marketing success in the United States are absorbed by other countries (e.g., a foreign location of environmentally unfriendly production processes). In fact, a whole system of redefinition of class is related to these "externalities" in that social distinctions are emerging as a result of the division of environmental and technological risks (Cohen 1997).

In the same year as Wilkie and Moore published their analysis of marketing's contributions to society, Hill and Adrangi (1999) published their analysis of global poverty. Their analysis of UN data on human development and human poverty shows that almost one-third of the world's population live in low human-development conditions and are income poor, die prematurely, and lack access to formal education (Hill and Adrangi 1999, 144). Additional research by Hill and Dhanda (1999) shows that poverty is negatively related to empowerment.

All of the authors just mentioned support the notion that marketing, in practice and as an academic discipline, should focus on the improvement of economic well-being or, as the case may be, poverty reduction, and that much of the work will be done in the areas of consumer behavior and public policy in marketing. This desire on the part of academic spokespeople must, however, reconcile with the power of transnational corporations and their trajectories (Beck 2000; Jones 2000), which are often unbent by concerns of environment, social responsibility, or quality of life. In fact, Henderson (2000) found that transnational companies combat global market regulations with innumerous legal challenges, political fundraising, lobbying, stonewalling, market manipulation, corruption, and even repression.

In addition to a focus on economic well-being, the consumer behavior discipline is calling for an examination of marketing's role in subjective well-being. Objective conditions, such as work, leisure, family life, and consumption, interact with subjective values, aspirations, and expectations that lead to subjective well-being (Ger 1992). Desires for shopping and consumption pervade daily lives to the extent that "the meaning of life is sought, identity is constructed, and relationships are formed and maintained more and more in consumption" (Ger and Belk 1996b). Borgmann (2000), writing on the moral complexion of consumption, found that consumers (in rich and productive countries) have become degraded by the nature of their consumption. Reliance on devices to solve problems and the material "quick fix" has left consumers disengaged from "focal things and practices" that once gave life meaning. Borgmann explained that prosperity can be divided into wealth and affluence, with wealth being social arrangements that allow engagement with the things in life that matter, and affluence being the social condition that encourages potentially unfulfilling consumption. Ger (1997, 112) suggested that a material culture will "aggrandize at the expense of the human and the environment and reduce the meaning of life to the material and a passive destructive dependence on that material." She thus recommended humane consumption as a sustainable option that also enhances well-being.

In psychology, the same theme is found in Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) work entitled, "If We Are So Rich, Why Aren't We Happy?" According to Csikszentmihalyi, material well-being has an ambiguous relationship to subjective well-being in part because individuals tend to think in terms of their "relative deprivation" and compare themselves to those who have the most in society. Thus, as income disparities in developed countries widen, more populations are unhappy and, as the wealthy lifestyle is communicated in worldwide media, all nations can make comparison with the very rich and become dissatisfied.

It is recognized that consumers belonging to societies that are less affluent and in transition can experience stress in approaching the imagined "good life" of the Western world. Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Porthero (1997) addressed this disparity in the distribution of wealth between countries and its consequential negative effect on consumers who lack the opportunity to consume. They suggest that pareto optimality "is offered as a value-free criterion of efficiency and becomes a justification for the status quo, which is manifestly unjust" (Kilbourne, McDonagh, and Porthero 1997, 12), and can only be used to justify inequitable distribution if there is continuous economic growth.

Consumption may be personally and socially enhancing for consumers in the affluent world who have affordable choice, time, knowledge, and skill; however, it may be frustrating, alienating, and damaging for less affluent societies when envy and discontent are experienced (Ger 1997). Thus, Strijbos (2001, 532) argued that "the most important goal in the era of globalization . . . should be concerned with identifying solutions to satisfy the material and immaterial needs of the world's population."

As a foundation to research in well-being, there exists already a large body of literature in marketing on quality of life. Quality of life (QOL) research in marketing has been summarized in six areas (Sirgy and Samli 1995): measures of QOL, marketing and satisfaction/dissatisfaction, QOL of vulnerable populations, aspects of lifestyle and QOL, impacts of particular industries/products on QOL, and expectations of future QOL. Although new studies of material and subjective well-being can build on existing QOL research, there is no shortage of unanswered international research questions:

- Can material well-being and subjective well-being be market driven locally and in the global context? Are there combinations of products and services that could be both profitable for firms and more positive for consumers?
- What lifestyle alternatives found across cultures are associated with increased well-being? Consumer behavior researchers have a role to play in helping more of the world's population become free from real and psychological poverty. Extravagant consumption may not make those extravagant consumers happier and, as noted by Borgmann (2000), is detrimental to those in poverty by tying up wealth. Research needs to be undertaken to investigate various international approaches to lifestyle modification including voluntary simplicity and ambition for saving versus spending.
- How is well-being best measured, and what research instruments can be developed to help measure the state of and improved well-being? (See Hill and Dhanda [1999] for a discussion of measures important to vulnerable groups.) A clear challenge exists in finding cross-culturally appropriate measurements. Interdisciplinary research including perspectives from anthropology, sociology, and psychology is needed.
- Well-being must be studied at both the micro- and macrolevel to be most meaningful. How might large-scale studies be undertaken? Consumer behavior researchers may have to work with governments to gain access to information and people to conduct research with the aim of improved well-being. This challenge suggests that researchers might become more proactive in applying for grants, perhaps from sources that support investigations of improved well-being such as the Asian Development Bank and World Bank.

Well-being is linked in part to the feelings we have about ourselves, our opportunities, and our limitations. Given that globalization, as discussed, pushes homogenization while at the same time supporting individuation, there is potential for a strong influence on the development of one's chosen identity. This is described in the next section as *elective identity* and is arguably a new phenomenon at the global level.

ELECTIVE IDENTITY

A working definition of elective identity is that sense of self that is developed by choice and change. It is the identity that people are able to self-fashion from the world around them, to pick up and discard at will. Some will argue that consumption as a source of identity has filled a void left by strong nation-states and by other social changes such as the empowerment of women (Du Gay 1996; Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998). Others find consumption to be nothing less than the leading player in a dramatic world transformation (Friedman 1994; Miller 1995). Our interest here is in how the elective-identity pursuits of consumers are both drivers of and outcomes of globalization and fragmentation.

The ease of access to other cultural tastes and products can create a comfort with other nationalities and a sense of being part of an international society. Firat (1996) argued that international media enable individuals to feel a social proximity with the rest of the world without physical proximity as a result of perceived closeness to media "friends." He stressed that membership in an international society does not entail a rejection of one's nationality but that people live in multiple, or multilayered, cultures. The products relating to these cultures gain a particular importance and enable consumers to sample and experience other cultures without physically relocating. Products from different national or ethnic cultures can become attractive, particularly when "mixed and matched" to produce a perception of individuality.

In cross-cultural studies and, more recently, in consumer behavior, there has been a recognition of (1) the ability of an individual to "self fashion" identity, especially through cross-cultural exposure (Gould and Stinerock 1992); and (2) the culturally diverse role possessions play in defining, securing, and communicating one's identity (Belk 1984). Examples of the relationship between identity and consumption abound. Ger (1997) cited Weismantel (1989) and the example from Zumbagua, Ecuador, where white bread is symbolic of the dominant culture and barley gruel is associated with the Indian ethnic identity. Eating bread, therefore, is considered to be a threat to indigenous identity and family strength, and requests by children for this product can cause an emotional reaction from their parents.

In both affluent and less affluent countries, youth subcultures resist their parental, local, and national culture by affirming their identity through body piercing and clothing (Ger 1997). Likewise, the global cultural flows that include technology, ideas, images, and people (Appadurai 1990) affect the "rules of the youth culture and create a recognizable worldwide identity." Amin (1997, 133) described globalization as juxtaposing hybrid places and hybrid identification that can be viewed as unity in diversity.

The consumer behavior perspective on identity stems in large part from research in psychology related to the self. Self-concept, or self-identity, has received substantial research attention in mainstream consumer behavior, but culturally oriented or cross-cultural investigations are fewer in number (see Olsen's [1995] ethnographic work, Consuming Rastifari, as an exception). The intersection of product and international context produces various potential meanings to be used in identity construction. For a local consumer population in Africa, the desire for African marriage necklaces will be linked to social relations and cultural forms, whereas for the international Euro-American consumer population, the desire is more likely to be associated with imagined exoticism and a vague understanding of the beads of original African owners (Straight 2002, 1).

Holt (1998, 13) suggested that a desire for perceived exotic consumption objects is the most powerful expression of the cosmopolitan-local opposition. It can also be argued that this process of international consumption allows a reappropriation of meanings and breaks the relationship between signified and signifiers while blurring the boundaries between copy and original as well as past and present (Gladstone 1998). This reconsignment of the meaning of foreign products by the culture of reception has been labeled *creolization*. In contrast with the Coca-colonization or McDonaldization paradigm, which involves the outward flow of goods and values from the West, it relates to the inflow of goods and their domestication (Howes 1996).

Technology and communications also play an important role in elective identity. Oppositional consumption that used to oppose establishment values can be successfully integrated across cultures using digital technology (Ozanne and Murray 2001). Owing to mass media communications, the Internet, worldwide sports, and entertainment events, the transformation of identities is a global phenomenon with similarities across nations and peoples. An illustration is that of young people who identify, in terms of lifestyle orientation, more with each other worldwide than with their parents (Dailey and Carley 2003).

The pressure placed on young people by the relentless consumption mantra is such that they feel obliged to buy branded products to fulfil their identity, even when these purchases leave more basic needs unmet. For example, a young mother and teen ward of the state told U.S. researchers (Cornwell and Gabel 1996) that when she had money, she bought her baby an expensive outfit and a pair of Barney shoes. The purchase of expensive clothing helped her support her identification with the image of a good mother. The importance of image is reflected as an international issue in developing countries where young people are reached by tobacco companies via sport and community sponsorship (Cornwell 1997). Images of health and success related to tobacco usage are used by young people to develop their self-identity. In sum, individuals must out of necessity craft or at least consider the identity options available to them; and, despite its importance, this kind of self-fashioning or elective identity has been explored in only a few studies (e.g., Gould and Stinerock 1992).

Key research questions that arise from the issue of elective identity in a globalized era include the following:

- To what extent does the exporting of Western television programs around the world affect individual's sense of identity? How is one's sense of identity related to ones well-being? We suggest that these research questions are particularly pertinent to the youth culture, and study of the effects of the internationalization of sports, music, and entertainment of all kinds is required.
- How significant are cross-cultural segments, such as youth culture and cosmopolitans, in the development of elective identity? To what extent are these opinion leaders shaping cross-cultural consumer behavior via the Internet and other technologies? To address this research issue, research methodologies using online focus groups with worldwide participants, Web-based surveys, and SMS (short-message service) key indicator surveys would be appropriate.
- What detrimental shifts in consumption patterns related to the attainment of identity aspirations can be identified? Perspectives that recognize the consumer as also producing a pattern of detrimental consumption (that which has potentially negative implications for the self, community, and natural environment) in their choice would be helpful (see Gabriel and Lang 1996).

As branded merchandise, entertainment, and daily life become more intertwined in the global milieu, the sources of identity elements proliferate and evolve. There is a growing need to understand the market structure that supports identity development. The next section discusses the global pressures toward both standardization and localization in market structure.

MARKET STRUCTURE AND POLICY

As products and services have been adapted to meet the needs of an international society, it is argued that there has been a shift to fragmentation and diversity rather than standardization (Segal-Horn 2002). Global firms, such as the McDonalds fast-food chain, are known to adjust their products to meet the preferences of local customers. These adaptations, however, relate not just to McDonalds selling tea in the United Kingdom and beer in Germany, but also to acknowledging microcultural needs. One such example can be found in specific regions of Australia with high Muslim populations, where burgers made from halal meat are offered.

Penaloza's (1994) work on the acculturation of immigrants suggests that marketing plays a significant role in supporting subcultural development and maintenance. The overwhelming nature of the globalizing experience makes individuals retreat to the known or the knowable, and here, products, services, and global brands offer an aspect of continuity, oftentimes forming a global market segment across nations and cultures. Thus, market structure, as shaped by business and government, plays a key role in consumption patterns—a role beyond the basic study of quotas, tariffs, and market-entry strategies.

The profundity of market structure to individual behavior options is made abundantly clear in Sen's (2001) discussion of development economics as a set of freedoms. Sen argued that public policies that foster human capabilities and substantive freedoms must work through the development of an interconnected set of political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective securities (2001, 10). Moreover, Sen found that lack of these freedoms are not only of concern for developing countries but also missing in some enclaves of developed countries. For example, Sen pointed out that African Americans in the United States, despite being many times richer than people in China or parts of India, have a much shorter life expectancy. They have been deprived of the freedom of living to a ripe old age. Sen noted that the causes of this difference include social arrangements, medical coverage, health care, education, law and order, and the prevalence of violence (2001, 22-23).

Sen's freedom-centric perspective is, by his own admission, very similar to discussions of QOL that have been mentioned previously but stem, in this case, from economics. Sen's writings also suggest that aggregate and cumulative statistics such as income and wealth are misleading. To best understand the evolution of market structures and the influence of policy, one must take more refined measures, measures that look at influence, control, and unfreedoms as they develop.

Market forces also contribute to disparities amongst nations. For example, Zook (2001, 1681) examined knowledge industries that supply Internet content and found that places such as the United States, which market and produce Internet content, possess a distinct advantage over the rest of the World. Zook's (2001, 1690) application of an Internet consumption quotient, which provides a standardized measure of the relationship between the supply (number of domains) and demand (number of users) of Internet information in a country, uncovered four main categories:

1. *Content consumers* that are primarily importers of Internet content and have no developed indigenous system to produce their own content (e.g., Eastern European and developing countries, Spain, Singapore, and Japan)
2. *Internet islands* that have sufficient domestic Internet content for their users' demands but still import Internet content from the global market (e.g., Australia and Israel) in view of their isolation from the Internet's emerging cores
3. *Export enclaves* that export content but are not as active in promoting domestic consumption (e.g., India)
4. *Global traders* that both produce a well-developed indigenous system and also export content (e.g., North America and Western European countries)

This classification highlights the domination of the United States and Europe in the diffusion of the Internet to the rest of the world, and suggests that the flows of data and communication emanating from this Internet core have major implications for cross-cultural consumption.

From an international marketing perspective, a great deal of consideration is given to different aspects of market structures (e.g., the number and size of retailers, level of competition, and role of government). In fact, a study of structure and policy at the macrolevel is central to any market entry analysis. Much less attention, however, is paid to consumer behavior strategies to cope with structure or policy that is at variance with individual consumer goals.

As an example, the concept of outshopping, or shopping outside the local market, has received very little attention in the studies reviewed here. International outshopping has been studied along the United States–Mexico border using survey research (Dawson and Garland 1983), from Singapore into Malaysia using survey research (Piron 2001), and in the United Kingdom–Republic of Ireland border using an ethnographic approach (Wilson 1993). Shopping forays from one country to another are often inspired by dissatisfaction with local market conditions (e.g., price and selection) and ebb and flow as relative currency values change and as economic policies such as those related to excise duties are imposed or lifted. The presence of outshopping often implies a unique consumer behavior pattern and a developed consumer infrastructure specifically accommodating to the behavior. Wilson (1993, 296) described this behavior for a small Irish border town:

> Newry retailers recall that throughout the early part of the decade it was not uncommon to have busloads of shoppers arrive from as far away as Cork, at the southern tip of Ireland a full eight hour round trip away, unload for a frenzied few hours of shopping, eating and drinking, and depart with shopping bags full of cigarettes, spirits, beer, and a few toys as wee gifts.

In considering the routes consumers take around market structure and policy, we are also required to look at the dark side of international consumer behavior including individual arbitrage and smuggling. Although Belk (1995) and Mick (1996) noted a widening of the consumer research agenda to include the dark side of consumer behavior (such as materialism, shoplifting, compulsive buying, prostitution, and addictions related to drugs, alcohol, gambling, and cigarette smoking), this has yet to be mirrored in the international marketing literature.

The Internet is fast becoming a conduit for the consumption of illegal products and services that enables consumers to bypass local regulations. Online gambling (Hammer 2001), online pornography (Alexander 2002), and the online accessing by minors of products such as wine (Toomey and Wagenaar 2002) and tobacco (Ribisl 2003) are a few examples of clandestine consumption that need further investigation from the perspective of international consumer/ consumption behavior. On a more positive note, the Internet is also a tool for online grassroots advocacy for the discouragement of illegal practices such as youth smoking (Ribisl 2003).

A further issue that should be addressed is the price-related arbitrage between markets that begins with an individual entrepreneur posing as a consumer in one country and then acting as a gray or black market trader in another country. Multinational corporations often show interest in large-scale arbitrage, but suitcase entrepreneurial activity is mainly the concern of border guards. This chameleon consumer-entrepreneur role is deserving of researcher attention. From the consumer behavior perspective, it is interesting to understand consumer participation in gray marketing practices, and from the international marketer's perspective, it is important to better understand the flow of goods through unauthorized channels.

In examining the dark side of international consumer behavior, one also finds smuggling activities. This behavior can range from the small-scale inclusion of fresh fruit and cheese in the bounty of a tourist's treasures to organized illegal trafficking. One area in particular that would benefit from a cross-cultural consumer behavior perspective is the smuggling of wildlife. According to Interpol, the international police agency, wildlife trafficking is the second largest form of black-market commerce, behind drug smuggling and ahead of arms dealing (Animal Genocide 1994). There is a need to understand the persistent consumer demand for exotic animals as pets and Oriental medicines, which oftentimes use body parts from endangered or exotic animals. For example, the legal trade of deer velvet antlers and deer parts has been fueled by the anti-aging–obsessed United States market (Claridge 2002). Moreover, researchers need to examine the belief systems and myths in certain cultures that support consumer markets for illicit and legally traded goods.

Although policy initiatives abound, they tend to focus on increased custom's control (Serko and Kane 1994), wildlife protection, and substitutes or alternative sourcing (Engardio 1992) and do not appear to be informed by a consumer behavior perspective. Many other dark issues have not been addressed from the consumer behavior perspective, including product piracy and counterfeiting; trade and smuggling of donated organs; and illegal immigration services, which sometimes result in the death of those seeking to immigrate and the illegal adoption of children.

Research questions that arise from this discussion include the following:

- How might we study the evolution of market structures so as to safeguard consumer interests and well-being? Market structures evolve throughout time with both business and consumers playing important roles. For example, the worldwide fast-food franchise explosion, now implicated in fueling a heath epidemic of obesity for industrialized countries, was crafted by both business and consumers.
- Why and how do consumers circumnavigate local and national policies to achieve their goals? The range of outshopping activities and other unsanctioned transborder flows is growing and influencing a wide range of industries, not simply retailers. For example, outshopping for medical services has been a problem for small, local U.S. hospitals for some time (Gooding 1994), but the problem has an international component that is growing as socialized medicine seeks to control costs. The focus of research needs to be on consumers in and between fragmented markets where the impetus to engage in questionable activities is highest. One question of interest is the tipping point at which consumers see such activities as being worth the risk.
- How has globalization affected the extent to which dark-side activities have developed in regard to channels of distribution, and how can these channels be researched? In New Zealand, smugglers use Asian tourists, helped by tour bus drivers, to take a shellfish called *paua* out of the country (Asian Tourists 2003). A top shipment nets $60,000 in Hong Kong (Napp 2002).
- Online, consumers have a new capacity to access illicit products and services (e.g., Alexander 2002; Hammer 2001; Ribisl 2003; Toomey and Wagenaar 2002). Research is needed to understand the development and maintenance of channels of distribution, including the Internet, for illegal or illicit goods. Clearly, this research would benefit from partnership with governmental departments and protection agencies, and naturally this type of research carries with it risks that are outside those typically faced in consumer research.
- What are the belief systems and myths in particular cultures that support consumer markets for illicit and illegally traded goods? As discussed, the anti-aging obsession of the U.S. market (Claridge 2002) and the desire for exotic medicines procured from protected animals affect consumer demand for illegal goods. How are these consumer belief systems driving demand and creating suppliers?
- What policy interventions are required to effect change in consumer behavior related to the consumption of illicit goods? A newspaper report describing the macabre scene found by rangers at Kenya's Tsavo East National Park recently underscores the urgent need for behavioral change. The rangers found a family of 10 elephants lying in large pools of their crimson blood. Some corpses were upturned; others were frozen on their knees as if they died begging. Their faces were hacked away so that the poachers who killed them could extract every inch of their tusks (Maharaj 2002, A17). It is believed that poachers are stockpiling tusks in the expectation of a lifted ban on the trade of ivory. A British-based network that monitors illegal wildlife trading found that the growing economic power of consumers in China is helping drive ivory demand worldwide. As highlighted above, policy initiatives tend to focus more on custom's control (Serko and Kane 1994), alternative sourcing, and wildlife protection (Engardio 1992) rather than consumer behavior.
- What role can consumer education play in reducing demand for endangered species and environmentally detrimental products? For example, the widespread practice of using explosives in fishing damages coral reefs and in some countries is as much concern as sea pollution and economic exploitation (Simanjuntak 2002). How could alternative approaches to fishing or alternative products be introduced? What role

can grassroots advocacy play in influencing global consumption behavior with regard to illegally produced products?

PARADIGM PLURALITY AND INTEGRATION

Obviously, many of the suggested cross-cultural consumer behavior research issues require different perspectives, research tools, and points of entry than much of our managerially oriented marketing research. The risks and challenges are, however, no greater than those regularly faced by international researchers in areas as diverse as cultural and social anthropology, sociology, and biology, to name but a few. This situation requires the use of diversity and paradigm plurality of two types: intercultural and interdisciplinary.

First, as argued by Craig and Douglas (2000) with regard to international research, we need to decenter our theories and constructs by removing the influence of a dominant culture or philosophy. According to Craig and Douglas, research approaches tend to reflect the dominant research paradigm values or philosophy of a given culture (2000, 394). This happens, for example, when researchers attempt to investigate concepts that really have no meaningfulness outside the dominant culture. For instance, those growing up under a Western medical system may find it difficult to understand the consumer demand for non-Western treatments and medicines. In these instances, Craig and Douglas suggested the participation of researchers from different cultural backgrounds to aid in decentering the research program.

Secondly, the research questions suggested here require an interdisciplinary perspective. Researchers interested in policy and economic levers must be willing to learn from ethnographers. Likewise, interpretivists must be open to learning from positivists. These are multifaceted research questions, and they are in need of multifaceted research programs.

Thus, we recommend the following:

- Diverse research teams including those from different cultural backgrounds (as discussed in Craig and Douglas 2000) as well as those from different research traditions. Multimethod studies (beyond the traditional qualitative exploration followed by survey work) are encouraged, as are longitudinal studies.
- Clearly, research of this nature is important, but some would ask How challenging will it be to publish research on these topics? This is a real concern. One answer is to consider high-quality research outlets that are general in nature and welcoming to macro-oriented work. Although publishing outside the business discipline is an option for some, it is preferable to bring these topics more fully into mainstream marketing and consumer behavior research. With the rise of corporate social responsibility and shareholder expectations regarding triple-bottom-line contributions to economic, social, and environmental performance, it is perhaps academic publishing that is behind the times.

MICRO-MACRO LINKING

Marketing, as a discipline, has always explicitly examined both micro- and macroperspectives (e.g., Hunt [1976] micro-macro dichotomy), and the same is true of consumer behavior; however, linking micro- and macrovariables has not been a research priority. Developing a micro-macro linkage in research demands analysis at two levels (individual and societal) and, equally important, some understanding of feedback or interactive relationships. Or, as social science researchers phrase it, “Linkage is how to create theoretical concepts that translate or map variables at the individual level into variables characterizing social systems, and vice versa” (Gerstein 1987, 86). There is some precedent for the type of research being suggested. For example, a stream of studies on marketizing economies (e.g., Damjan 1993; Lofman 1993; Shama 1992), and the spread of a culture of consumption (e.g., Anderson and Wadkins 1991; Joy and Wallendorf 1996) attempt to relate micro- and macrophenomena. Perhaps one of the best examples would be the work of Penaloza (1994) on the consumer acculturation of Mexican immigrants. Penaloza tied the individual experiences of immigrants to the institutionalization of Mexican culture in the United States and explains how marketers actually participate in creating the character of a market, thus linking micro- and macroanalysis and contributing to our understanding of an overall system. This perspective includes societal interactions between individuals as well as resulting societal structures and institutions.

Micro-macro linking is relevant for all substantive foci outlined in Figure 1. The most obvious need for micro-macro linking is in examinations of behavioral impacts on the environment. Research of this nature investigates the interplay between individual behavior and the total system. For example, it examines how individual well-being relates to societal well-being. In this area, the research of Shrum, Wyer, and O’Guinn (1998) and Sirgy et al. (1998) on the effects of television consumption on social perceptions holds implications for micro-macro linking. When consumers, as a result of their individual television-viewing patterns, develop a social reality in which they feel disadvantaged (despite this feeling stemming from a comparison to programming content rather than from comparison to other real consumers), cumulatively, social well-being is eroded.

This suggested emphasis on micro-macro linkages may require the consumer behavior researcher to consider new methods and new paradigms, but the expansion can only be illuminating. What is being suggested is more than simple aggregation in the move from micro to macro. Again, referring to work in sociology,

> The logic of combination differs from that of aggregation in that whatever factors are combined are done so . . . by attempting to assess variables that are qualitatively different

in character but, when combined, give a more adequate explanation of some macrophenomenon. (Mnch and Smelser 1987, 377)

There are many routes to linking and combining:

- Venkatesh (1995) advocated ethnoconsumerism as a paradigm to study cross-cultural consumer behavior. Although this research has something in common with the emic-etic (within and across language) perspective of Pike (1967) in advocating study from the viewpoint of the cultural group, it contributes a consumer behavior perspective to the approach and supports consideration of both individual and societal behavior.
- Memetics is a new paradigm that has only recently been introduced to consumer behavior (Williams 2002). Memes include concepts and practices that move directly from mind to mind as a result of imitation (Barnett 2002). Transmission of these nongenetic cultural traits is said to be selective, with good or valued traits being perpetuated. Although memetics is still in its infancy as a paradigm, it constitutes a basic building block that is meaningful at both the individual and societal levels (see Gatherer 2002).
- Another consideration for cross-cultural consumer behavior research is other-centered love as a paradigm to further the consumption adequacy of the poor on a global basis (Hill 2002, 19). This perspective focuses on the QOL experienced by the poor and seeks community-based solutions.
- Theories of internationalization, even the most flexible such as an eclectic paradigm (Tolentino 2001), tend to focus on firms and countries and not consumers and markets. Consumer-led markets for products and services such as those discussed as dark-side consumption do not have an identified internationalization process. Consumer tastes and preferences might feature in market-entry strategies, but this belittles the consumer's role in the creation of international channels of distribution, product specification, and the development or curtailment of demand.
- One methodological approach to micro-macro linking would be to use system dynamics, as advocated earlier in the section on environment.
- Future research (Glenn 1994) could also be considered, especially normative forecasting, which addresses the following questions: What future do we want? What is the desirable future? What do we want to become?

Just as globalization and fragmentation are two parts to one story, so are macro- and microperspectives. In each of the research areas outlined, our need to understand the individual is just as great as our need to understand the whole and the relationship between the two.

CONCLUSION

Navigating through the impact of globalization and fragmentation processes on cross-cultural consumer behavior, this article has drawn attention to necessary research and the potential for new approaches to research these problems. The framework offered here, and developments based on it, incorporate the basic building blocks of human interaction including the natural environment, our identity and well-being, and the structure of markets. Most important, this framework should sanction much-needed research on topics of world importance.

NOTE

1. Despite its inadequacy and its methodological preference for comparison, the term *cross-cultural* continues in currency. Marketing might be better served by considering terms like *anthropologys multi-sited* (Marcus 1995), which accommodates increased methodological and conceptual complexity.

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